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**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD  
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

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Property Address:	<b>1337 Connecticut Avenue, NW</b>	<b>X</b>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>Dupont Circle Historic District</b>		Consent Calendar
		<b>X</b>	Concept Review
Meeting Date:	<b>June 28, 2012</b>	<b>X</b>	Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	<b>12-421</b>		New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Steve Callcott</b>		Demolition

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Valor Development, representing Endeka Enterprises LLC, seeks conceptual design review for construction of two additional floors atop a non-contributing building in the Dupont Circle Historic District. Plans have been prepared by Trout Design.

**Property History and Description**

1337 Connecticut Avenue was constructed as a four-story bank and office building for the Hamilton National Bank in 1953.<sup>1</sup> Designed by the local firm of Corning & Moore, its design is illustrative of Modernism in the immediate post-War period in Washington. Rather than being a complete break from the past, the building features a monumental composition, limestone façade (since painted), and abstracted classicism that was common in the 1940s and 1950s as architects synthesized the aesthetics of traditional and modern design.

As a building type, it is also representative of its era. Through the 19<sup>th</sup> century and until the 1920s, banks were typically designed as imposing and distinctive monumental temples. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, banks were becoming less iconic and readily-identifiable and were often indistinguishable from commercial office buildings. Indeed, many banks (including 1337 Connecticut) were designed to include substantial commercial office space that could be leased to outside tenants as a means of maximizing the value of the real estate.

1337 was expanded in the rear, fronting on 18<sup>th</sup> Street, in the 1980s after the creation of the historic district. The addition reads as an entirely separate structure from the Connecticut Avenue frontage designed to relate to the residential scale and character of the neighboring contributing buildings on 18<sup>th</sup> Street.

While recognized in the Banks and Financial Institutions survey as a distinctive example of the building type from the post-World War II period, the building is non-contributing to the Dupont Circle Historic District, as it falls outside the district's period of significance (1791-1931). It is not otherwise listed or protected.

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<sup>1</sup> The bank is named after Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury; the building features a distinctive relief carving of Hamilton immediately adjacent to the front door.

## **Proposal**

The proposal calls for converting the building to residential use, and adding two additional floors. The existing penthouse (fifth floor), set back 11 feet from the façade, would be reclad in a glass curtain wall similar to its existing appearance. The new sixth floor would be set back an additional 12 feet and the new seventh floor set back an additional 25 feet from Connecticut Avenue. On 18<sup>th</sup> Street, the existing penthouse (fifth floor) is set back 14 feet; the new sixth and seventh floors would be set back an additional 16 and 13 feet respectively. The additional floors would also be clad in glass curtain wall system.

## **Evaluation**

The Board has evaluated additions to non-contributing buildings using similar criteria as for new construction, which is for general compatibility with the context, streetscape and character of the historic district, rather than for their effect on character-defining features of the building or the potential to otherwise alter the appearance of a historic structure. While the Board has ensured that these changes be reasonably appropriate for the design of the subject property, the primary focus has been in ensuring that the alteration not result in an incompatible alteration to the property's context.

In evaluating compatibility, the Board's guidelines on new construction and additions cite height as one of the important characteristics for consideration. That guidance recognizes that height must be evaluated with consideration of the particular context. Where there is a uniformity of height, new construction and additions should more closely adhere to the established height; when there is greater diversity, there can be more variation in the height of new construction and additions:

*“While a building does not necessarily need to be exactly the same height as its neighbors to be compatible, it should be designed to respect existing building heights.....On the other hand, a new building built in a street of existing buildings of varied heights may be more than one story higher or lower than its immediate neighbors and still be compatible.”*

*“While an addition does not necessarily need to be exactly the same height as the existing building, it should be designed to be compatible to the existing height of the building and its neighbors.”*

The subject property is located immediately adjacent to almost identically scaled four-story buildings on each side. 1341 to the north and 1333 and 1331 to the south all share a common height and cornice line with the subject property. The existing penthouse level on 1337 has minimal visual impact on the building or the row so that collectively the four buildings express a unity of height, scale, vertical emphasis and materiality that visually ties them together.

The proposed additional floors, while not visible from immediately in front of the property, would be visible up and down Connecticut Avenue, as well as from 18<sup>th</sup> Street and Massachusetts Avenue. The multiple setbacks and angles of the additional floors would result in a complicated massing and inharmonious roof line that is incompatible with the relative simplicity of the building forms on the block. As seen from both Connecticut Avenue and 18<sup>th</sup> Street, the proposed additional floors would detract from the uniform roof lines of the buildings that immediately surround it and which the building currently respects.

As an alternative, the HPO would encourage a simplified design for one additional floor rather than two. Based on the perspective studies, it appears that a sixth floor with a relatively low roof profile and simple form could have minimal visibility and impact.

### **Recommendation**

The HPO recommends that the Board:

- Find the proposed recladding of the penthouse in a glass curtain wall system to be compatible with the character of the historic district
- Find the concept for two additional floors to be incompatible with the character of the historic district; and
- Direct the applicants to study an alternative proposal for one additional floor with a simplified roof profile, and return to the Board for review when appropriate.